

# GALSWORTHY JOHN

THE LITTLE MAN: A  
FARCICAL MORALITY IN  
THREE SCENES

John Galsworthy

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Morality in Three Scenes**

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**Galsworthy J.**

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# **John Galsworthy**

## **The Little Man: A Farcical Morality in Three Scenes**

### **CHARACTERS**

THE LITTLE MAN.  
THE AMERICAN.  
THE ENGLISHMAN.  
THE ENGLISHWOMAN.  
THE GERMAN.  
THE DUTCH BOY.  
THE MOTHER.  
THE BABY.  
THE WAITER.  
THE STATION OFFICIAL.  
THE POLICEMAN.  
THE PORTER.

## SCENE I

Afternoon, on the departure platform of an Austrian railway station. At several little tables outside the buffet persons are taking refreshment, served by a pale young waiter. On a seat against the wall of the buffet a woman of lowly station is sitting beside two large bundles, on one of which she has placed her baby, swathed in a black shawl.

WAITER. [Approaching a table whereat sit an English traveller and his wife] Two coffee?

ENGLISHMAN. [Paying] Thanks. [To his wife, in an Oxford voice] Sugar?

ENGLISHWOMAN. [In a Cambridge voice] One.

AMERICAN TRAVELLER. [With field-glasses and a pocket camera from another table] Waiter, I'd like to have you get my eggs. I've been sitting here quite a while.

WAITER. Yes, sare.

GERMAN TRAVELLER. 'Kellner, bezahlen!' [His voice is, like his moustache, stiff and brushed up at the ends. His figure also is stiff and his hair a little grey; clearly once, if not now, a colonel.]

WAITER. 'Komm' gleich'!

[The baby on the bundle wails. The mother takes it up to soothe it. A young, red-cheeked Dutchman at the fourth table stops eating and laughs.]

AMERICAN. My eggs! Get a wiggle on you!

WAITER. Yes, sare. [He rapidly recedes.]

[A LITTLE MAN in a soft hat is seen to the right of tables. He stands a moment looking after the hurrying waiter, then seats himself at the fifth table.]

ENGLISHMAN. [Looking at his watch] Ten minutes more.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Bother!

AMERICAN. [Addressing them] 'Pears as if they'd a prejudice against eggs here, anyway.

[The ENGLISH look at him, but do not speak. ]

GERMAN. [In creditable English] In these places man can get nothing.

[The WAITER comes flying back with a compote for the DUTCH YOUTH, who pays.]

GERMAN. 'Kellner, bezahlen'!

WAITER. 'Eine Krone sechzig'.

[The GERMAN pays.]

AMERICAN. [Rising, and taking out his watch – blandly] See here. If I don't get my eggs before this watch ticks twenty, there'll be another waiter in heaven.

WAITER. [Flying] 'Komm' gleich'!

AMERICAN. [Seeking sympathy] I'm gettin' kind of mad!

[The ENGLISHMAN halves his newspaper and hands the advertisement half to his wife. The BABY wails. The MOTHER rocks it.] [The DUTCH YOUTH stops eating and laughs. The GERMAN lights a cigarette. The LITTLE MAN sits motionless, nursing his hat. The WAITER comes flying back with the eggs and places them before the AMERICAN.]

AMERICAN. [Putting away his watch] Good! I don't like trouble. How much?

[He pays and eats. The WAITER stands a moment at the edge of the platform and passes his hand across his brow. The LITTLE MAN eyes him and speaks gently.]

LITTLE MAN. Herr Ober!

[The WAITER turns.]

Might I have a glass of beer?

WAITER. Yes, sare.

LITTLE MAN. Thank you very much.

[The WAITER goes.]

AMERICAN. [Pausing in the deglutition of his eggs – affably] Pardon me, sir; I'd like to have you tell me why you called that little bit of a feller "Herr Ober." Reckon you would know what that means? Mr. Head Waiter.

LITTLE MAN. Yes, yes.

AMERICAN. I smile.

LITTLE MAN. Oughtn't I to call him that?

GERMAN. [Abruptly] 'Nein – Kellner'.

AMERICAN. Why, yes! Just "waiter."

[The ENGLISHWOMAN looks round her paper for a second. The DUTCH YOUTH stops eating and laughs. The LITTLE MAN gazes from face to face and nurses his hat.]

LITTLE MAN. I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

GERMAN. Gott!

AMERICAN. In my country we're very democratic – but that's quite a proposition.

ENGLISHMAN. [Handling coffee-pot, to his wife] More?

ENGLISHWOMAN. No, thanks.

GERMAN. [Abruptly] These fellows – if you treat them in this manner, at once they take liberties. You see, you will not get your beer.

[As he speaks the WAITER returns, bringing the LITTLE MAN'S beer, then retires.]

AMERICAN. That 'pears to be one up to democracy. [To the LITTLE MAN] I judge you go in for brotherhood?

LITTLE MAN. [Startled] Oh, no!

AMERICAN. I take considerable stock in Leo Tolstoi myself. Grand man – grand-souled apparatus. But I guess you've got to pinch those waiters some to make 'em skip. [To the ENGLISH, who have carelessly looked his way for a moment] You'll appreciate that, the way he acted about my eggs.

[The ENGLISH make faint motions with their chins and avert their eyes.] [To the WAITER, who is standing at the door of the buffet]

Waiter! Flash of beer – jump, now!

WAITER. 'Komm' gleich'!

GERMAN. 'Cigarren'!

WAITER. 'Schon'!

[He disappears.]

AMERICAN. [Affably – to the LITTLE MAN] Now, if I don't get that flash of beer quicker'n you got yours, I shall admire.

GERMAN. [Abruptly] Tolstoi is nothing 'nichts'! No good! Ha?

AMERICAN. [Relishing the approach of argument] Well, that is a matter of temperament. Now, I'm all for equality. See that poor woman there – very humble woman – there she sits among us with her baby. Perhaps you'd like to locate her somewhere else?

GERMAN. [Shrugging]. Tolstoi is 'sentimentalisch'. Nietzsche is the true philosopher, the only one.

AMERICAN. Well, that's quite in the prospectus – very stimulating party – old Nietch – virgin mind. But give me Leo! [He turns to the red-cheeked YOUTH] What do you opine, sir? I guess by your labels you'll be Dutch. Do they read Tolstoi in your country?

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

AMERICAN. That is a very luminous answer.

GERMAN. Tolstoi is nothing. Man should himself express. He must push – he must be strong.

AMERICAN. That is so. In America we believe in virility; we like a man to expand. But we believe in brotherhood too. We draw the line at niggers; but we aspire. Social barriers and distinctions we've not much use for.

ENGLISHMAN. Do you feel a draught?

ENGLISHWOMAN. [With a shiver of her shoulder toward the AMERICAN] I do – rather.

GERMAN. Wait! You are a young people.

AMERICAN. That is so; there are no flies on us. [To the LITTLE MAN, who has been gazing eagerly from face to face] Say! I'd like to have you give us your sentiments in relation to the duty of man.

[The LITTLE MAN, fidgets, and is about to opens his mouth.]

AMERICAN. For example – is it your opinion that we should kill off the weak and diseased, and all that can't jump around?

GERMAN. [Nodding] 'Ja, ja!' That is coming.

LITTLE MAN. [Looking from face to face] They might be me.

[The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

AMERICAN. [Reproving him with a look] That's true humility. 'Tisn't grammar. Now, here's a proposition that brings it nearer the bone: Would you step out of your way to help them when it was liable to bring you trouble?

GERMAN. 'Nein, nein'! That is stupid.

LITTLE MAN. [Eager but wistful] I'm afraid not. Of course one wants to – There was St Francis d'Assisi and St Julien L'Hospitalier, and —

AMERICAN. Very lofty dispositions. Guess they died of them. [He rises] Shake hands, sir – my name is – [He hands a card] I am an ice-machine maker. [He shakes the LITTLE MAN's hand] I like your sentiments – I feel kind of brotherly. [Catching sight of the WAITER appearing in the doorway] Waiter; where to h-ll is that glass of beer?

GERMAN. Cigarren!

WAITER. 'Komm' gleich'!

ENGLISHMAN. [Consulting watch] Train's late.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Really! Nuisance!

[A station POLICEMAN, very square and uniformed, passes and repasses.]

AMERICAN. [Resuming his seat – to the GERMAN] Now, we don't have so much of that in America. Guess we feel more to trust in human nature.

GERMAN. Ah! ha! you will bresently find there is nothing in him but self.

LITTLE MAN. [Wistfully] Don't you believe in human nature?

AMERICAN. Very stimulating question.

[He looks round for opinions. The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.]

ENGLISHMAN. [Holding out his half of the paper to his wife] Swap!

[His wife swaps.]

GERMAN. In human nature I believe so far as I can see him – no more.

AMERICAN. Now that 'pears to me kind o' blasphemy. I believe in heroism. I opine there's not one of us settin' around here that's not a hero – give him the occasion.

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